

Health and Faith Partnership Makes Communities Healthy and Whole

Issue

African-Americans in Lancaster County, South Carolina are more likely to die prematurely from heart disease, stroke, and cancer than their Caucasian counterparts. Trends in Lancaster County reflect statewide trends. For example, heart disease is the leading cause of death in South Carolina and in Lancaster County, and stroke is the third leading cause of death in the state and fourth in Lancaster County. The statistics speak for themselves:

- The cost of cardiovascular disease in South Carolina is nearly \$1.4 billion in direct costs.
- In 2002, the rate of stroke deaths among African-Americans (96 per 100,000) in Lancaster County was more than twice that of whites (40 per 100,000).
- The death rate in 2002 for heart disease among African-Americans (475 per 100,000) was almost 1½ times that of whites (356 per 100,000) in Lancaster County.
- In 2002, the death rate for prostate cancer among African-Americans (42 per 100,000) was 7 times that of whites (6 per 100,000) in Lancaster County.

Intervention

Thanks in part to Block Grant funds and a grant from the J. Marion Sims Foundation, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control has implemented *Healthy and Whole*, a faith-based health initiative that addresses health disparities. The goals are to reduce early onset and premature deaths from chronic diseases, through education and awareness of lifestyle choices and their impact on one's health. Initiatives include:

- Targeting African-American adults age 25-45 because of the disproportionate number with chronic diseases in adults age 45 and older.
- Train the trainer workshops provide lay congregational health promoters with information and materials for use in educating their respective congregations. Training topics covered include heart disease, stroke, diabetes, hypertension and cancer prevention by focusing on healthy eating, increased physical activity, and tobacco cessation.
- Trainings delivered through a collaboration with several organizations and agencies, including Clemson Extension Services, Lancaster Diabetes Education Center, Lancaster County Library, Springs Memorial Hospital, Lancaster County EMS, and the Palmetto Project's Heart & Soul Initiative.

Impact

Twenty-one African-American congregations in Lancaster, Great Falls, and Fort Lawn have partnered with Healthy and Whole to establish health ministries for their congregations. As a result of Healthy and Whole and the congregational health ministries:

- Ten congregations have formed walking and/or other clubs to increase physical activity.
- All twenty-one congregations have established rules against using tobacco products in the church sanctuary. Three congregations are developing informal policies against use of tobacco products on church grounds, as well as new policies to include healthier food choices at congregational meals.
- A prostate cancer awareness campaign is being conducted through several churches in Lancaster County. Prostate cancer screenings are available for 200 men age 40 and older through a grant from the South Carolina Cancer Alliance.

Contact: Janet Ellis, Healthy and Whole Project Coordinator

Lancaster County Public Health Department

PO Box 817, Lancaster, SC 29721

Phone (803) 286-9948; Fax: (717) 783-5498 ellisjb@dhec.sc.gov